

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 620

By Faison

A RESOLUTION to honor and recognize the historical importance of Tanner Training High School in Cocke County.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly take great pleasure in recognizing an institution that played an instrumental role in improving educational opportunities for African Americans before the integration of our school systems; and

WHEREAS, Newport Consolidated School (NCS), later to become Tanner Training High School, was built in 1924 to provide a new elementary school for Black children; and

WHEREAS, although the school was built primarily with money raised by the community, NCS also gratefully received funds from the State Board of Education, the local boards of education, and a grant from the Julius Rosenwald Fund (JRF), a project of Sears-Roebuck magnate Julius Rosenwald that provided financial assistance in the construction of model rural schools for African Americans; and

WHEREAS, John Williams Rice, a Black schoolteacher, sold the City of Newport a three-acre lot on Mulberry Avenue for the purpose of building NCS and also donated bricks for the construction of the school from his own brick-making business; local Black craftsmen, who donated their labor, were responsible for most of the work; and

WHEREAS, some of the first teachers at NCS were Una V. Gorman, Lillie May Mills, Mattie Reinhardt, Irene Gorman Smith, Mrs. Brazzelton, May Frazier Leeper, Gladys Brabson Morton, and Mattie Lee Brabson Crumbley, and the principals of the school were Dr. Dennis Branch, Reverend Hargraves, Mr. Miller, Mr. Hudson, Mr. Tippet, Mr. Crumbley, Reverend Joiner, Reverend Rakestraw, and Leon Pope, a schoolteacher from Knoxville, who served as the first principal of NCS in 1924; and

WHEREAS, in 1926, Dr. Dennis Branch, a well-respected Black physician who held degrees from Shaw College and the University of Tennessee Medical School, was hired to serve as principal of the school; in 1927, attorney and former Tennessee Governor Ben W. Hooper, a friend of the Black community and a proponent of education reform, joined the Cocke County Board of Education; and in 1929, Dudley S. Tanner, a white schoolteacher, became the State Rosenwald Agent for Black schools; and

WHEREAS, these three leaders worked tirelessly to convince the Cocke County Board of Education of the importance of supporting NCS and lobbied successfully for continued improvements to its facilities; and

WHEREAS, with an increase in classroom space made possible by a 1929 JRF grant, efforts were renewed to hire high school teachers at NCS, and in September 1930, Miss Hattie L. Young became the first in a long line of dedicated educators to teach secondary students there; and

WHEREAS, during this time, the Black community honored Dudley S. Tanner for his tireless support of NCS by renaming the school in his honor, changing its appellation to "Tanner Training High School"; and

WHEREAS, by December 1930, eighteen Black students attended Tanner Training High School, and in 1931, Tanner graduated its first class of three pupils, Gladys Brabson, Elizabeth Thomas, and Jay Hayworth; and

WHEREAS, although Tanner's growth was initially supported at the local level by the addition of teachers and facilities, the Great Depression severely curtailed funding for all schools, and in subsequent years, Tanner and its needs were woefully neglected in favor of the renovation and construction of whites-only schools; and

WHEREAS, by 1942, Tanner had forty-eight high school pupils attending class in one room, and the State Board of Education was threatening to revoke its accreditation due to

overcrowding; the Black community, which had become outraged by the county's failure to properly fund Tanner School over the years, sought the advice and support of the NAACP, which joined with a committee of local leaders to demand improvements be made to Tanner High School by the Cocke County Board of Education; and

WHEREAS, although the NAACP's petition garnered support from the community, politics intervened, and many promises were broken during the ensuing five years; and

WHEREAS, in October 1947, the school board finally funded the long-awaited Tanner School expansion project; the five-room addition opened in 1948 and included a new bathroom, kitchen, and cafeteria, and five new classrooms, three of which were to be used for high school classes; in 1954, Tanner School's first gymnasium was finally funded; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Issac Rakestraw, an African-American schoolteacher from Knoxville, became principal of Tanner School in 1946 and supervised the improvements to the school; by 1955, 286 students had attended school at Tanner at one time or another, with 153 of them having graduated; and

WHEREAS, in 1966, school integration was accomplished in Cocke County, and most of the high school students attending Tanner School were transferred to Cocke County High School; the last Tanner graduating class consisted of three pupils, Deborah Danzie, Jerry Carr, and Alfreda Carr, in 1966; and

WHEREAS, local historians state that, until the school's closing in 1966, every African American in Cocke County could trace his or her academic roots to Tanner School, and that is a legacy well worth preserving; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor and recognize the historical importance of Tanner Training High

School in Cocke County and pay tribute to the school's legacy of providing educational opportunities for African-American students during a segregated era.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.